Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Saint Paul’s Community College
Waterford
Roll number: 72241E

Date of inspection: 16 September 2011
REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning indicated good practice in some areas, with scope for development in others.
- There was limited use of French as the language of instruction in most of the lessons observed.
- Effective teaching strategies included sharing the lesson plan, preparatory activities for aural skills development and the use of student-based tasks.
- There is good whole-school provision in the allocation of time, but scope for development in timetabling.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should expose students to greater use of French as a language of instruction and communication.
- An integrated approach to language skills development should be adopted in all lessons.
- Schemes of work should be developed for the current year and to support future subject planning.
- The current arrangements for Transition Year (TY) French should be revised so that students planning to study the language in senior cycle can benefit from a meaningful TY programme.
INTRODUCTION

St Paul’s Community College is a co-educational school with 476 students. It serves an urban population in Waterford City. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was limited use of the target language by the teachers in most of the lessons observed. While it is acknowledged that the students being new to the language need support, they should be exposed to the use of simple French as a language of communication from the outset. Teachers should give basic instructions in French, teach simple classroom language, post relevant expressions on the walls and refer to them. Teachers should check students’ comprehension before automatically translating and the use of visual supports is also recommended. These strategies will serve to scaffold learning while at the same time ensuring that the more able students are challenged.

- The proposed lesson plan was communicated to students in one instance. This practice should be adopted throughout and articulated in terms of what students should know by the end of the lesson. Identifying and sharing the learning outcomes supports good lesson structure, engages students and enables teachers to review what has been achieved in the lesson.

- A preparatory phase, identifying and explaining key words, was used in one lesson to support a listening activity. This good practice should be extended throughout. Other types of preparatory work such as brainstorming should also be considered, particularly to support differentiation.

- One student-based task was assigned in most lessons. However, greater clarity was needed in some instances as to the purpose of the activity. If the focus is oral skills development, the task assigned should necessitate interaction, however basic, in the target language. The benefits of pair-work activities should be maximised by getting students to report back on their partners’ interactions.

- Most lessons were predominantly teacher-directed. There were instances where some students put up their hands to contribute, but were not given the opportunity to do so. Teachers should afford students every opportunity to actively participate in the lesson as this will build up students’ confidence, raise expectations and improve attainment.

- The emphasis in one lesson was on examination preparation rather than on language teaching. It is recommended that an integrated approach be adopted in all lessons where the focus is on developing the different language skills. Relevant sections of examination papers can then be used to assess the outcomes of the teaching and learning process.

- Homework was assigned in all of the lessons observed and a review of student copies indicated evidence of teacher corrections. To further support this good practice, teachers should keep a record of all corrections in order to track students’ progress.

- A review of student results and trends in the certificate examinations in French indicate a need for greater vigilance in relation to the uptake of levels and attainment. Teachers should conduct an annual audit of student outcomes for French and use the information to inform future planning and raise attainment.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision of French, Spanish and German indicates good whole school support for modern languages. However, the uptake of languages is low. A root-and-branch review of modern languages should be undertaken and strategies devised in order to reverse this trend.

- To ensure an appropriate skills set, all teachers involved in the delivery of French should have it as a registered teaching subject.

- The allocation of time for French is appropriate. However, the number of double periods for French limits ongoing contact with the language. Senior management should explore ways whereby French could be timetabled in single periods at junior cycle and where senior cycle students would have a maximum of one double period per week.

- The classrooms visited had attractive displays of French posters, some classroom language and students' work. The posting up of keywords already in use by the French Department is good. As the year progresses, teachers should extend these displays to include useful expressions for the topics being studied.

- There is good access to resources, but teachers need to exploit them further. There was no use made of information and communication technology (ICT) in the lessons observed. The use of more varied resources including ICT is recommended as a means of enhancing teaching and learning in the classroom.

- Teachers reported that they are planning a range of co-curricular activities for the current academic year. This is welcomed as such activities provide opportunities for enjoyable language and cultural experiences.

- In the interests of both linguistic and pedagogical up-skilling, teachers are encouraged to avail of the range of scholarships and in-service training provided for teachers of French.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers of modern languages work together for the purpose of subject planning. This is good practice given the small numbers involved. The subject planning folder submitted on the day of the inspection contained hand-written schemes of work for each year group for previous years, but not for the current academic year. It is recommended that global learning outcomes be established for each year group in terms of ‘can do’ statements and included in the permanent section of the subject plan. Schemes of work for the current year outlining the topic, learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment should also be prepared, electronically recorded and amended from year to year depending on their effectiveness in achieving the desired learning outcomes.

- Plans contained in the subject planning folder to promote modern languages should be used in conjunction with the findings from this inspection in conducting a full review of the teaching and learning of languages. The outcomes should inform future planning with a view to making language learning more attractive and to improving student outcomes.

- The inclusion of literacy and numeracy information in the planning folder is good practice. Teachers should also consider extending the range of practical strategies to be used in the language class. The provision and use of class sets of dictionaries is good practice. However, when introducing students to dictionaries, teachers should consider working with the English Department to teach students how to best use them.
• All students take French in TY. This limits the opportunities for students who have already studied French to further build up their linguistic skills and benefit fully from the TY programme.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

This was a very comprehensive inspection of the subject and highlighted areas which needed close examination by the school management and teachers of the subject. The findings and recommendations are a valuable guide to us as we plan for the future of French in the school.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Since the completion of the inspection, a review of the subject has taken place and strategies put in place to enhance the teaching and learning of the subject. As our broadband installation has been completed and staff training has taken place, there has been a greater use of I.C.T. in the classroom. Successful French days have taken place and other activities to improve the profile of the subject in an effort to increase uptake of French. The recommendations in relation to time-tableing for Transition Year will be implemented in next year’s programme.